

The Crooked Path

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This issue of the Crooked Path Journal is late, I'm afraid. Nature, the economy and humanity in general could be said to have conspired to bring about this tardiness, but in all honesty the simple truth is that I allowed these things to get in the way of finishing the issue.

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We've had a move at short notice due to our landlord defaulting on the mortgage, but that resulted in us moving to a much better location. We've had our car written off in a late-night collision (we were unhurt), but we've ended up with a better, more environmentally friendly car with lower payments. And lastly, we've had wildfire at our doorstep, but that actually gave me the opportunity to work from home (in case we had to evacuate), and that enabled me to lay this issue out, or the delay would have been greater.

In this issue you will see some old friends and some new faces that I hope will become regular contributors. Please feel free to send in articles for the next issue, and remember that the opinions stated in these articles belong to their author, and we do not necessarily agree with them.

Bendith,

Peter





BEEFCAKE, WHINE AND CHEESE

Orlando's Holy Land Experience Theme Park through Pagan Eyes

By Grace Victoria Swann

I first learned of the Holy Land Experience while watching Bill Maher's 2008 film "Religulous." According to imdb.com, the working title "A Spiritual Journey" was used in production so Mayer could obtain interviews with religious leaders and access to places that otherwise would have never let the comedian commentator through their doors otherwise. Press passes and permission to film interviews was granted without question. Only after Maher showed up and filming of interviews began did the people who actually knew who he was freak out. (Brilliant, Mr. Maher...absolutely brilliant!!!)

In the film, the Holy Land Experience is portrayed as a place where only those who have drunk of conservative, white bread soaked Christian Kool-Aid would be welcome. This is cemented tightly during a scene in the film that features obviously upset park representatives (on camera) demanding that Mayer and crew leave immediately.

In the few minutes of film dedicated to the park, it comes across as "so bad that it's good".

It was less than three months after I enthusiastically uttered the words "OH...I have so GOT to go check out that place!!!" when serendipity led me down a strange, dramatic path to take me to Orlando, Florida.

Advertised as giving Americans an opportunity to visit Jerusalem without a passport, the Holy Land Experience is a biblically themed tourist attraction owned by Trinity Broadcasting Network. TBN is the world's largest Christian television empire, touting more than 12,500 television and cable outlets worldwide.

The park is adorned with stucco-based architecture replicas of buildings from 2,000 years ago. It considers itself a "ministry" and features "musical dramas, uplifting presentations, and featured exhibits." Reading between the lines, I was led to believe that I was going to be preached to. I assumed I would be accosted at the entrance gates – a Pagan undercover and on a magazine assignment in evangelism land. Fortunately, I was wrong.

Akin to other area attractions, Holy Land Experience is loaded with positives and negatives. But after spending a day there, my assessment is that it would probably be a destination of enjoyment for small children as well as most adults.

The Positives

Many things surprised me. The luscious, serene gardens that pepper the grounds beckon to be used as places for journal writing and meditation. Because of the large amount of senior visitors, there are plenty of wrought iron benches upon which to sit.

Thoughtful, artistic sculptures of everything from Roman soldiers, to angels, to maidens representing the four seasons adorn the park grounds. It is worth the admission alone just to eyeball the landscaping as well as the rich tapestries, furniture and other embellishments that adorn many of the buildings.

I was told by a park employee that one of the owners – Jan Crouch, the mascara wearing, big-haired, dramatic blonde that seemed to overtake television land when Tammy Faye Bakker retreated from the limelight – is personally responsible for many of the little touches within the park. Her taste in décor is extraordinary. The almost Moroccan feel of some of the interiors of the stucco-architecture buildings took me aback. Ms. Crouch is also apparently responsible for the jewelry selection, much of the clothing and more unusual gift items available. (Confession: I spent \$110 in one of the gift shops.)

Overall, I found the staff to be quite friendly. And there are plenty of wonderful photo ops – whether you want to pose with a model of Moses, sit in a manger with Mary, Joseph and all the animals or simply capture shots of the local flora. Also, unlike what was portrayed in “Religulous” the demographic makeup of attendees includes in-bred Caucasians as well as a nice multi-cultural blend. I chatted with people from Mexico, Africa, Brazil and England while waiting for events or standing in line.

There’s enough to do and see to fill a day, particularly if taking advantage of the educational offerings. From a Pagan perspective, I was most enamored with The Scriptorium as well as with a presentation called “The Wilderness Tabernacle”.

Utilizing historical accuracy, The Scriptorium addresses how The Bible was written by forty different human authors over the period of 1500 years, and shares the journey of the texts from ancient tablets and papyri through the middle ages, 15th and 16th centuries, to the modern era. Approximately 200,000 guests per year view the exhibit.

From Babylon to the Library of Alexandria to Gutenberg's Print Shop to John Bunyan's prison cell, visitors are led through an exhibit that dramatically displays original, rare manuscripts. (Note: Yes, there are items from Babylon as well as the Library of Alexandria on display.)

There are Coptic manuscripts written on parchment as well as items such as a Latin Glossed Epistolary, rich with illustrated mythological symbols and some of the first Gutenberg and Wyclif printed Bibles. During the exhibit, tales are also shared about the people that lost their lives while preserving the "word of God" throughout the centuries.

Contents of The Scriptorium come from The Van Kampen Collection. The Van Kampen family owns one of the largest private collections of rare Bibles, scrolls, artifacts, manuscripts, and magical texts in the world. A web search will reveal much more about their elaborate research collection in greater detail.

A dramatic presentation worth witnessing, "The Wilderness Tabernacle" features a "recreation of the mobile temple that provided a place for God to dwell among the Israelites during their forty years of wandering in the desert." During the presentation, rituals are performed and explained by an ordained High Priest. Sitting in a room full of wide-eyed Christians, it was at this point in the day that I realized that I realized that I knew what was going on even before the action or activity was announced over the public address system. The full moon painted on one wall, the creation of lustral water, burning of incense, bubbling of a cauldron, choice of directional movement and gestures, and muttering of words made me feel right at home.

I felt a little sad when the Priest came out at the end of the demonstration and announced proudly, "man no longer is required to perform all these rituals because of the birth and sacrifice of Jesus."

I held myself back from standing up and speaking out at this point. "Some of us still do all of that stuff, sir. It is part of how we Pagans commune. Those things you did alter consciousness and connect us with the divine."

Admittedly, I was afraid of being lynched.

Bite Your Tongue

Unfortunately, that wasn't the only time during the day that I wanted to speak up. Despite the overall friendliness of a large majority of the staff, there were those few that I interacted with that made me cringe.

Specifically, a couple of male employees found it necessary to entertain some of us by whining about their family members who had not “come to the Lord”. How bad was this whining? It didn’t just interfere with my day, I could also tell from the rolling of the eyes from some of the people surrounding me that the employee comments weren’t gaining any brownie points with anyone else either.

I don’t think that Disneyland would allow for Winnie the Pooh to wander around and verbally dis’ Owl’s pride, Rabbit’s suspected sexual preferences, or Piglet’s desire to hit the bottle. It just wouldn’t be accepted – however, I do guess that this could technically be considered “ministry”, if babbling incessantly and being in judgment of another human being is part of your denomination’s preferred repertoire.

In addition, a couple of the exhibits were tagged with an almost commercial endorsement: “Brought to you by Jesus Christ.... Lord and Savior of humanity.”

It was a hot day. It sounded like a plug for Coca Cola.

The staff and exhibits that overtly push Jesus come across as unauthentic. Plus, when you think about the visitor demographic – isn’t this all preaching to the choir? After all, a majority of people learns about the park through their church or watching shows on TBN. As I understand it, the park does not track demographics – including the religious preferences of their visitors. But, it would only make sense that if you’re going to shell out the \$35 adult ticket price, you’re probably already Christian. Come on...teach the history, folks! 99 percent of attendees really believe there were only 10 commandments. Please continue to minister to their ignorance; after all, they’ve already drunk the wine (or grape juice).

If you are lactose intolerant and can’t handle cheese, stay away from the live theatrical/musical presentations as well as the “Behold the Lamb” passion drama. Yes, the performers are quite talented. But, I really felt like the material was written to meet the perceived desires of blue-haired old ladies accompanied by their husbands who have opted that day to leave their hearing aids at home.

“Celebrate America” a catchy musical presentation was filled with timeless tunes such as “You’re a Grand Old Flag” and “God Bless America”. Honoring military veterans is always a good idea. But, I don’t know how the guy that plays the part of the Mayor in the dramatic portion of the show can do his job. A nice looking, African-American man in his late 20s, he was apparently forced to mimic a 1930s, straight off the cotton-farm dialect to carry off his role. While amusing to the southern seniors who probably still have fond memories of separate entrances and water fountains for “colored folk”, I was honestly offended.

But by far, it was “Behold the Lamb” that took the cake for me. It was a hunka-hunka Jesus-the-King beefcake to be more specific.

The passion drama claims to be the longest running and self-proclaimed “most-powerful” presentation in the park. I thought it was cheesy. And even my mother, who is a blue-haired senior, felt the same way. We compared notes. Although the years have passed, our experiences and the audience reactions were scarily the same.

The script is jumpy. Most of the cast is obviously bored with their roles (Jesus is crucified at 12:45 and 5 PM daily!) and the staging was cumbersome.

The Holy Land web site description of the show reads: “It is our prayer that once you’ve seen it you will never be the same.”

I can definitely attest to that. I will never be the same as a result of seeing that show.

Among the things I learned that day was that old Christian women like to take lots of pictures of a muscular long-haired man in his 30s with a nice tan, dressed in nothing but fake thorn crown and a strip of cloth.

Row after row, I saw old men rubbing their arms to take the tinge out of the fingernail claw marks left behind as their wives grabbed the cameras from them with a fervor. The camera flashes really started going off when Jesus got flogged and fell to his knees.

The women were making moaning noises. Some were furrowing their brow. In a strip club setting, these same women would be flashing one and five dollar bills.

The guy playing Jesus came across like a Chippendales dancer one minute, conceited rock star the next.

Some people in the audience began tearing up. I’d like to think that it was because they were moved emotionally, but I’m not so sure. One look from him after the (ahem) resurrection and those blue-haired ladies melted. The glaze in their eyes made me think that they themselves wanted to get on their knees too – and I don’t mean to pray.

Yes, those could have been tears from an invoked feeling of sacrifice or gratitude. But I really think that the tears were because of the memories of youth long gone.

Or, it could have been from a realization that a muscle got pulled from jumping up too quickly to get a particular snapshot.

Some things are so distasteful that they are quite delicious. And there was something strangely satisfying – although slightly disturbing -- about watching these women come out of their shells in an environment where they obviously felt safe.

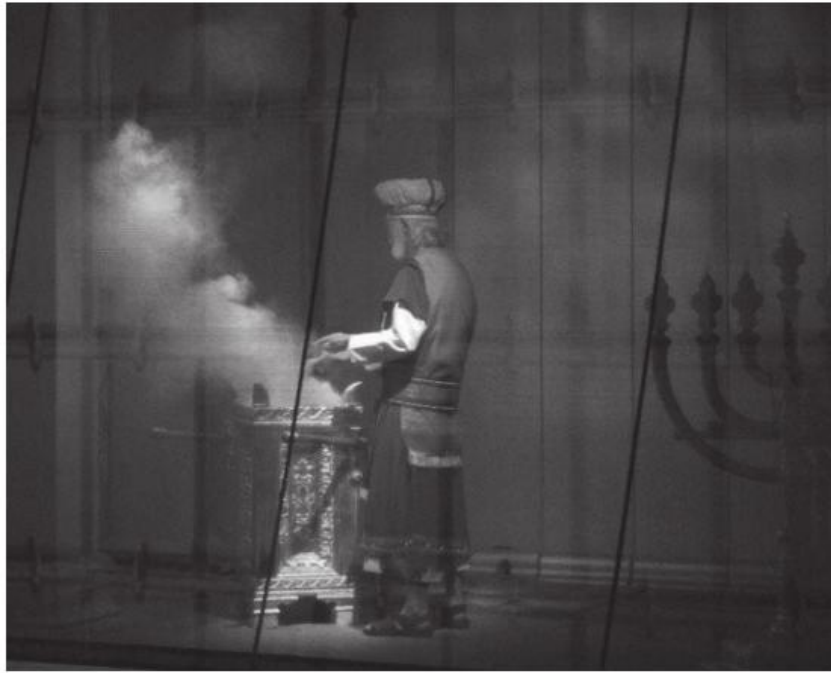
In conclusion, do I recommend that Pagans visit The Holy Land Experience?
Hell, yeah!

Just don't forget to pack your sense of humor – and wear some comfortable walking shoes.

To learn more visit www.holylandexperience.com



Spectacular gardens line the park, making it a great place for meditation and journaling. There's plenty of seating and occasional music.



A priest lights incense as portion of a ritual offering during a historic presentation called "The Wilderness Tabernacle".



Roman soldiers man-handle Jesus, pulling his robe slightly to show some skin. (This is about the point in the show where the old ladies surrounding me grabbed the cameras from their husbands and started shooting in a frenzy.)



The ladies with the blue hair are still taking photos. The flash photography is almost blinding at this point. And I realize I'm in a room, in a religious theme park, watching women taking photos of Jesus as he's stripped down to his skivvies...tied up and is being flogged. (Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't this bordering the realms of voyeurism and BDSM?)



It's not a rock concert, Grandma. Jesus has risen. He's wearing better clothes and a devilish smile.



An abundance of sculptures, including this one bearing the fire element, pepper the park. The four seasons are also represented, in four directions, of course.

THE DRIFT:

Using A Hoodoo Method In Traditional Sorcery

By Jongiorgi Enos

One thing which continually strikes me in my ongoing explorations along the pathways of human spirituality, is how often I encounter ideas or discoveries which I initially thought to be my own, but which already exist in the literature. In fact, I almost always eventually discover a reference somewhere to an experience I've had, or to an interpretation of an experience which exactly parallels my own. There is no new thing under the sun, and I have never—apparently—had an original thought!

It is as if there is a relatively finite number of categories of experience, and each of these categories is continuously being re-discovered or re-remembered by each new generation. This process has accelerated in our time due to the sheer ease of sharing information, but there is an aspect of synergy, of synchronicity, of spirituality itself, inherent in the very experience of finding something you yourself have encountered in the testimony of another. The sense of recognition, of belonging, of not being alone—the sudden: ah-ha!—is itself a magical thing.

In my long years of work in various religious contexts (including Christian and Buddhist explorations, as well as various pagan and occult-oriented practices), I have found this recurrence of basic forms more the rule than the exception. This has led me to believe that spiritual experiences are *human* experiences which simply happen in whatever religio-cultural context that person happens to be in. The context is almost always unimportant—although that tends to be where we place most of our emphasis. We are in grave error when we fall under the illusion of what I call the “Myth of Exclusivity”: the belief that our context is the only, or best, context; or the belief that our experiences are in any way unique.

One such discovery happened recently as I was reading an essay about Hoodoo, written by Stephen Grasso for a presentation in the UK in 2004 (linked under Phil Hine's website: philhine.org.uk). The article is a fairly broad introduction to Hoodoo, and more particularly regarding its connection with Chaos Magic, but I found one section of it relevant to my own explorations, and essential to anyone who practices sorcery or spellcraft, as many under the ‘traditional’ umbrella do.

In one section, Grasso discusses the practice of assembling materials for spell work in a Hoodoo format he calls “the drift”. I found to my surprise that I had many times had exactly the same experience—both in a magical context and not. And even if you do not engage in spell work, per se (or results-oriented mysticism, sorcery, craft magic, seidr, or any number of other terms and expressions), the

concept of the *drift* is still relevant, as I found in my life even prior to engaging in magical explorations.

Drifting is a classic form of altered state, a sort of walking meditation, where the practitioner physically goes out looking, searching, seeking, for something—sometimes specific, sometimes not—needed for a work of magic, or for some other project. The person is propelled forward by desire, filled with a focused intent; the mind is engaged, the imagination energized; hope swells in the heart, a prayer is on the lips.

As a human experience, going out to get something is universal and ubiquitous. We are constantly fetching wood, carrying water, hunting game, seeking a mate or stepping down to the corner for a pack of ciggies. Everything about our lives is a series of needs, drives and desires. Because of this fact, it is easy to take the act of going out for something for granted. But once examined a bit more closely, it is easy to see that everything about the act of ‘stepping out’ is filled with magical potentiality.

To *drift*, with specifically magical intent, is a bit more rarified an experience, however. Oftentimes, the goal is only loosely defined. One wanders, open to the possibility of discovery, the senses heightened and alert for a different kind of communication with the environment. One is seeking for signs, on the hunt for anything unusual or even vaguely oracular. In the Hoodoo context, the goal is to find materials for a particular spell. The practitioner has a general idea of what is required, a knowledge of the correspondences or appropriate materials, but is open to intuition or inspiration in the moment, to discover the perfect ingredients for the work at hand. And there is an understanding that when something is drawn most directly from one’s own working environment (in distinction from, say, buying something generic from a mail-order catalogue), it has a particular power and visceral relevance.

Here’s a quote from Grasso’s experience:

In my own work I might use a combination of traditional hoodoo ingredients acquired from a supplier, along with items that I’ve drifted for. Literally walking the streets of the City, under the guidance of ally spirits, looking for ingredients to go into the magic. Curious plants growing between paving stones, discarded bus tickets, dirt collected from old London power spots, creepy items seen in charity shop windows, strange objects found in dark alleyways, all functioning as totemic items feeding into the magic.

While I have found it possible to *drift* while driving (in fact, I have had several extremely powerful experiences doing so), the classic drift is done on foot. The act of

walking is particularly able to facilitate an altered state of consciousness, as it engages the body and the breathing. It is an exercise not unlike trance-dancing or intense drumming. Walking with intent, focused magically onto everything surrounding you, right down to the detritus on the street, takes you very quickly into an altered state where influence from spirits (if that's how you work) or intuition from within (if that is your context), is particularly facile and fluid and readily within reach. Some of my favorite trance journeys have been on long, vigorous walks, often wearing earphones to allow me to sculpt my sensory experience.

I engaged in this practice long before I consciously practiced magic. When I was a Christian, I would often meditate on a question while on these trance-walks, and I would often receive wisdom, sometimes in the form of voices. In the context of my upbringing, I simply accepted the messages as being the promptings of “the still, small voice of the Holy spirit”. Since that time, I have heard various muses, guilds, spirits or gods, again depending on the context of my mindset.

Even in a secular sense, I have often found myself confronted with writer's block on a given creative project, and found that going jogging or on a vigorous walk, will almost always bring me a solution. It is as if the act of moving greases the wheels, so to speak, oils the psyche sufficiently to propel invention.

To my mind, however, a true *drift* differs from a walking trance in that you are seeking something physical, some object or sign, not just some revelation or inspiration. You go out to find material from your immediate environment, and you are actively seeking guidance to find those objects which are *just right*, be it for a spell or some other work. I have gone out to find objects which I felt necessary for some magical tool or spell, and been guided to the bodies of power birds (I have found a raven, an owl and a hawk in this manner); or bones, or specific plants; or even power spots—locations on the land which had particular energy (including Maidu grinding stones, a 100 year old wild grape vine, and various other natural temples which resonated with me).

On one occasion, I drove around Los Angeles until I found a specific prop I needed for a play I was producing on top of a rubbish heap. On another, I walked out of an apartment I hated in search of another, and was lead directly to the place, several miles away, where I would live for the next two years. Once, when I was 20, I had an unexpected layover in Nice, France, a city I had not been in since I was 7. In a burst of mad enthusiasm, I walked out of the train station with no map or compass, and *drifted* until I found the bar my grandfather had owned before I was born. When I walked in, the proprietors nearly fainted—seeing as I looked like a 20 year-old version of my grandfather, whom they had worked with for years before buying the place from him before his death. Then, in the most spectacular example of *drift* I have ever experienced, a friend of mine's son had gone AWAL in Mexico. We knew nothing about his whereabouts except the name of the city

and that he lived near a school. We went there, and *drifted* around the streets of Rosarito (population 56,000) until we found him, eight hours after we had arrived, up on a balcony, his back to the street. We recognized him by his laugh, and his size. He was very surprised to see us.

Most of my *drifting* experiences were not within a consciously magical context (though all, of course, were magical). I knew what an altered state of awareness felt like, even if I didn't know what to call it. and I knew that 'things happened' or ideas came or that I found things, whenever I was in that state. I had stumbled upon the practice of spirit-guided *drifting* by myself, from a young age, and had engaged in it with such success that when I later stumbled upon it within the magical literature in the context of gathering materials for spells, it felt as authentic and familiar as an old pair of shoes. Here is Grasso again, talking about finding spell materials, a *la drift*:

Over time, an entire language of ingredients begins to develop out of your practice - a personal hoodoo Quabala made out of the things that exist in the streets where you live. It's an instinctive magic that grows organically out of what you're doing. It's not cobbled together on a wet afternoon over a cup of tea and a copy of Crowley's 777. It's alive and within the world. The process of collecting ingredients can be thought of as a two-way dialogue between the practitioner and the universe, or the spirits, or however you may wish to frame it. Items won from a lengthy, difficult or possibly dangerous hoodoo drift take on a numinosity that transforms them from unusual or even mundane objects into holy relics and powerful totemic items.

This idea of personalized magic is particularly important in our day and age. Information is easy to get over the internet, but the price we pay for this kind of connectivity and easy access is a form of homogenization. Go to any online occult shop, and you can find the exact same things, like a franchise of magical McDonalds. While we have easier access to genuine craftsmanship, we can also fall into patterns of generic plasticity in our working materials. Not that plastic is automatically bad. As Grasso points out:

A bit of plastic with the word "win" written on it added to a gris-gris bag for success, becomes more than the sum of its parts if you acquired it by following a fragment of map found at the crossroads to a dodgy bar in the East End, where a combination of a song on the radio and an overheard conversation inspired you to prize the totem object off a fruit machine - resulting in six enraged skinheads and a terrifying chase across London.

This is a great story, but the point is that there was complete uniqueness in the found object, a series of seemingly random events that imbued the object with its own special resonance, regardless of how generic an object it might be in a different context.

There is another aspect of *drifting* to find just the right thing, and that is what it does to your connection with your own working environment, be it a countryside, a neighborhood or an entire city. Much of magical work is about honing our perceptions, and nowhere is this more important than within our immediate environment. For while we have access to the entire world online, and though our minds fill the universe through pop culture, and while our spirits may wander far a field on the astral, the fact is that our bodies inhabit a specific place, and it is through that place, and our direct connection to the spirits in the land we directly inhabit, that our most profound work takes place. This sensitivity to the land beneath our feet is particularly recognized by Traditional crafters, which is one reason I am drawn to the Trad way of thinking.

I happen to live in a rural area, surrounded by forests. But my knowledge of these forests—both practically and magically—was pretty dismal, until I began questing my local trees for the creation of a local Ogham. In a process which is still ongoing, my wanderings brought me into direct discovery of my surroundings (and taught me specific trees and their lore) in a way which could never have happened had I been content to simply purchase a set of generic Ogham staves off the net. (The full story of my Ogham journey of discovery is the subject of an eventual book.)

But country or city, the magical wander engages the senses in a way which cannot help but connect you to your working environment. As Grasso points out:

Learning where to find your ingredients re-shapes your understanding of the City and its psychogeography at a magical level. The process you go through in constructing items such as gris gris bags and condition oils is as much a part of the magic as the items themselves. I think comparisons can be made with the stern admonitions in medieval grimoires to go out and forge your own magical sword, or construct your own hooded robe, etc... Engaging with these processes takes you on an initiatory journey, and working sorcery in hoodoo seems to function as a more accessible backyard formula for setting in motion that kind of process.

I have found this to be resoundingly true. And I have found that the more hand-made and/or personally assembled my working items are, the more engaged my imagination, the more focused my intent, and the more efficacious my workings.

Even if “magic for results” is not your bag, and spellwork is not in your practice, even

if your only goals are for spiritual self-improvement or insight, consciously engaging in a magical *drift* could become a powerful practice for you. This is especially true if you find your work has become moribund, or if you feel disconnected to where you live, or if for any reason you need to reinvigorate your practice. Try walking out of your door on a focused quest for objects in your immediate surroundings—for use in your rituals or on your alter; or even for the herbs to season your soup. The experience of wandering in a magical state of mind, of exploring within an altered consciousness, of opening yourself up to the possibility of the random being, in fact, just what is needed, is a powerful thing. I have done it spontaneously throughout my life, and very specifically since picking up the practice of sorcery. Though originally from the South, the sorcery I have learned has not been of the Hoodoo variety; nevertheless, it is amusing to see that across cultures and traditions, practices overlap—even if the vocabulary is different.

In this case, I like the Hoodoo words for it. Do yourself a favor: go on a *drift*.



SHAMANISM: COUNTEABLE OR UNCOUNTEABLE?

MIRCEA ELIADE REVISITED

'In a strange region he scales steep slopes
Far from his friends he cuts a lonely figure...
So momentous are his travels among the mountains
To tell just a tenth would be a tall order

These lines from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* could also be used to describe the way of the shaman, because he/she lives a life apart from other too, and has difficulty in conveying in words just what it is that he/she experiences when journeying into other realities. Perhaps this is why the accounts of such journeys were often turned into folktales, as it was the only way to make them both understandable and acceptable to people not familiar with the landscapes to be found and experiences to be had in such worlds.

So what is shamanism? We could simply say that what shamans practise, whether they call themselves indigenous, urban or neo-shamans, is what shamanism is, but this would just be avoiding the question and would be of little help to anyone. Instead, the following definition is proposed:

A shaman is understood to be someone who performs an ecstatic (in a trance state), imitative, or demonstrative ritual of a séance (or a combination of all three), at will (in other words, whenever he or she chooses to do so), in which aid is sought from beings in (what are considered to be) other realities generally for healing purposes or for divination—both for individuals and / or the community.

As for the practice of shamanism, it is understood to encompass a personalistic view of the world, in which life is seen to be not only about beliefs and practices, but also about relationships—how we are related, and how we relate to each other. In shamanism the notion of interdependence “is the idea of the kinship of all life, the recognition that nothing can exist in and of itself without being in relationship to other things, and therefore that it is insane for us to consider ourselves as essentially unrelated parts of the whole Earth” (Halifax in Nicholson, (comp.), 1987, p.220). And through neurotheology, this assertion so often heard expressed in neo-shamanic circles that all life is connected, can now be substantiated. This is because

it has been shown that during mystical ecstasy (or its equivalent, entheogenic shamanic states [states induced by ingesting hallucinogens]), the individual experiences a blurring of the boundaries on the ego and feels at “one with

Nature”; the ego is no longer confined within the body, but extends outward to all of Nature; other living beings come to share in the ego, as an authentic communion with the total environment, which is sensed as in some way divine (Ruck, Staples, et al., 2007, p.76).

Further justification for the belief that all life is connected can be found in the fact that the elementary particles that make up all matter, by their gravitational, electromagnetic or nuclear field, are coextensive with the whole universe, and as man is composed of these particles, he is thus in union with the entire cosmos (see Eliade, pp.285-286). Whether he wants to be or not is immaterial.

Traditionally it was the role of the shaman to maintain the equilibrium of the community he / she represented by focussing on the interrelationships within it and resolving any discord there may have been. The neo-shaman, on the other hand, tends to work within in a much wider community where not everyone shares the same practices and beliefs. Consequently, his or her work is generally more concerned with helping individuals rather than the community.

The following observation by the Hungarian academic Vilmos Voigt draws attention to the limitations of neo-shamanism: “None of the actual personal or social problems of the unemployed or the bored rich are solved by attending urban drum classes” (Voigt, 2009, p.216). On the other hand, it is doubtful whether it could be said that attending services held in any churches, temples, mosques or synagogues can satisfactorily solve the above-mentioned problems either. What such practices can be said to do, though, is to help us to make some sense out of our existence and also to make our lives more manageable.

In the 1960s neo-shamanism became one of the Western spiritualities that capitalized on the Eliadean vision presented in his seminal work *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, which was an attempt “to descend to the depth of the human spiritual tradition, to find the roots of the primal religion and to decipher its universal archaic patterns that could be retrieved for future spiritual regeneration” (Znamenski, 2009, pp.187-188). According to Eliade, what “archaic” peoples could do and what modern ones were unable to do was, through myth and ritual, to return to the primal time, and the most accessible way to do so was through fiction. “Eliade was convinced that in contemporary society literature was one of the remaining strongholds of ancient mythological conscience; he called fiction “the residue of mythological behaviour” in modern world” (Znamenski, 2009, p. 189), and the fiction he himself wrote reflected this (see Berman, 2008, pp.213-246).

Eliade’s scholarship appealed, in particular, “to American and European spiritual

seekers who revolted against Western civilisation and who felt at home with all his eclectic cross-cultural symbolism” (Znamenski, 2009, p. 196).

Despite the fact that Eliade’s reputation has become somewhat tarnished in recent years¹, his importance in the history of the development of neo-shamanism cannot be over-emphasized. For in addition to rehabilitating nature religions in the eyes of Westerners, he stretched out the geographic borders of shamanism so that it came to be applied to “all non-Western and pre-Christian European spiritualities which did not fit the format of organised world religions and in which spiritual practitioners worked in altered states” (Znamenski, 2009, p.197).

One of the criticisms levelled against Eliade is for the dubious nature of his research, which was often based on second-hand accounts. If he were here with us today, however, he would no doubt dispute this accusation for, as he states in one of his journals, “I have always made an effort to draw the *facts* and their interpretation from those who still participate in a pre-Christian religious universe” (Eliade, 1977, p.101). It should also be remembered that as a historian of religions, field work was never part of his remit

One of the people profoundly influenced by Eliade’s scholarship was the American anthropologist Michael Harner, who then went on to develop “core shamanism” by singling out what he viewed as common archetypes of shamanism from all over the world. And out of this he developed what he refers to as Core Shamanic Counselling, a form of counselling designed to enable clients to become their own shamans – in other words, to teach them how to journey to their power animals and sacred teachers in non-ordinary reality to find answers to their problems for themselves. Training courses are run by organizations such as the Foundation for Shamanic Studies, established by Harner himself, and the Scandinavian Centre for Shamanic Studies run by Jonathan Horwitz. So without Eliade there might have been no Michael Harner, and ‘without Harner’s *The Way of the Shaman* and the books of Carlos Castaneda (whose doctoral thesis was actually examined by

1 Eliade’s reputation has taken quite a knock in recent years but Rennie’s *Reconstructing Eliade: making sense of religion*, based on his doctoral work, is worth reading in this respect as it helps to redress the balance and place his contribution to the study of shamanism in perspective. In this respect, it is also worth pointing out that although Eliade’s *Shamanism and Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, was not received as a genuine scholarly work when it was first published in 1951, in fact it had never intended to be. Eliade himself makes this clear in his *Journal* when he explains: “I would like it to be read by poets, playwrights, painters... who would benefit more from it than historians of religions”, and “my research could be seen as an attempt to rediscover the forgotten sources of literary inspiration” (quoted in Le Manchec, 1991). However, despite Eliade’s stated intentions, the effect of the publication was to rehabilitate shamanism, which had up to that point been associated with little more than backwardness and insanity (see Hamayon, 2000).

Harner), the interest currently being shown in shamanism would surely never have developed in the way that it has.

As for what attracted Eliade (who referred to himself as Christian) to shamanism, his interest was very much influenced by traditionalism.

Traditionalism was a loose movement that spread in the turbulent European atmosphere of the 1920s and the 1930s. Grounded in Romanticism and linked to European esotericism, it united conservative European ideologists, writers, and spiritual seekers who crusaded against the legacy of Western civilization, particularly Enlightenment, capitalism and materialism. Overwhelmed by modernity, these people were seeking to solace themselves in their own indigenous roots and soil. The quest for roots meant the retrieval of ideal ancient indigenous spirituality that, as they argued, was erased by cosmopolitan Judeo-Christian tradition (Znamenski, 2009, p184).

One of their leading proponents was Julius Evola, who conveyed the intellectual stance of this movement in his book *Revolt against the Modern World*.

Eliade believed that the sacred should be discussed on its own terms without being reduced to social life, history, economics, and brain function, and his method became known as the phenomenological approach. As he pointed out in his own diary in 1946, his intention was to present shamanism in the general perspective of the history of religions rather than as an aberrant phenomenon belonging more to psychiatry” (see Eliade, 1990, p.18).

One of Eliade’s concerns was that in his efforts to give himself the means of knowing the world objectively and mastering it, modern western man was in danger of emptying the world of all its extranatural meaning (see Eliade, 1977, p.55). “The neuropath loses the sense of reality. He can no longer grasp a reality that is of construction, a mask. The neuropath demystifies life, culture, the spiritual life. Not that the neurosis puts more perfect instruments of knowledge at his disposal than those of the normal man – but because the neurotic can no longer grasp the deep meaning of things, and consequently, he can no longer believe in their *reality*” (Eliade, 1977, p.144).

Though he is surely to be respected for not attempting to remove the “magic” from shamanism by trying to explain away exactly what it is that shamans do when they journey into non-ordinary reality, his cross-cultural and universal vision of shamanism is not so acceptable to the present-day postmodernist thinkers who treat “with suspicion any grand comparison-the method Eliade used in his numerous books and articles” (Znamenski, 2009, p.200). However, it seems to

me that by referring to “shamanisms” rather than “shamanism” as Jane Monnig Atkinson (1992) and Robert J. Wallis (2003) do, the importance of shamanism becomes trivialized, and thus this approach does its practitioners more harm than good.

If there is considered to be no need to turn the names of other religions into countable nouns, then there is no reason to do so with shamanism either, at least for those of us who regard it as a religion. After all, there is not one religion that does not take a variety of different forms, so why single out shamanism for such grammatical treatment? Although keeping the noun shamanism uncountable might not be a particularly fashionable view to take, the alternative makes no sense to me.

Actually, there is no need for me to defend Eliade’s position, which is that we have the right to generalise in the history of religions, as he can stand up for himself:

Socrates tried to learn the essence of virtue. Examples of different virtues didn’t satisfy him – he asked his interlocutors for a definition of virtue. He forced them to observe that the multiplicity of virtues doesn’t mean that there doesn’t exist an element that is common to all. (I think of my controversies with the historicists, who refuse to accept structures and believe only in the “concrete,” isolated and defined by its own historico-cultural context (Eliade, 1977, p.151).

Eliade does, however, add the proviso that we should only do so “On the condition that we present the essential on the scale on which we are working, and that we be coherent” (Eliade, 1977, p.202). And this, in the case of my own attempt to define the nature of shamanism, is precisely what I have set out to do.

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WEIKERIE: THE TRUE STORY OF WITCHCRAFT, THEN AND NOW

By Robin Artisson

In the mists of the most ancient of days, our first ancestors lived on broad, expansive grasslands with endless stretches of rivers and dark stands of forest scattered about. Distant mountains rose up to clouds, and frost-bringing winds scoured the ground and trees in winter. We don't know where they came from originally, but when they first expressed their primordial cultural yearnings with invention and imagination, binding themselves together into cohesive and related groups through the powers of language-sorcery and artifice-art, they were east of Europe, in the trans-Eurasian steppes, near the great inland Caspian sea, and in the environs of the Don and Dneiper rivers.

It really doesn't matter where they were; the world at that time was nothing like it is now. No one lived then who had a vision of a blue globe glowing in the black void of space; no one lived then who knew every mountain chain and what lay beyond every ocean. No one had even the first idea of the many different sorts of people or civilizations that might be encountered if they traveled far enough in any direction. What "world" means to us now is nothing like what it meant to them.

These ancestors were wise in other ways; they lived on the soil, under the sky, with an infinite omnidirectional power of multi-faceted life and mystery stretching away from them: the mystery of the ancestral land. It was linked, harmonically, to the mystery of the glowing stars in the freezing night, whose shapes traced out destiny. This was the foretime of our ancestors; animals spoke, all things possessed strange powers, and Gods and demons walked the earth and fought for supremacy amid the majestic forces of nature's great body. The dead were not severed away and gone; they dwelled in the land, as part of it; they interacted with the living in regular ways and following hidden cycles of the dusk-world.

As our people wandered and spread out into the unknown, they came to know of the other peoples they encountered; and they knew, after a course of countless

centuries of mystical connection, even deeper lores about the land and sky which they had organically learned through spectral intercourse with the spirit world: that intensely mysterious “other side” of life, reached through extraordinary states of conscious awareness. They knew what they needed to know then about the luminous ruling powers- strange divine entities- that ruled the plains of the heavens, and they knew, from an even earlier date, about the spirits that appeared as plants and animals, and about the spirits of the dead, in the gaping darkness of the world below.

They knew about primal forces that were divine, who were so old as to be nameless, but still potent- the dark female spirit who through the noose of death around the dying and bound all things with Fate beneath the grave, and who drew souls to birth from the black waters below; they knew about the entity who emerged from the deepest places of the soul as a mighty, antlered being, with a potent and erect phallus, master of serpents and beasts; they knew about the whirling, rushing, windy inspirer of rage and ecstasy; they knew the land itself as a feminine entity of titanic, giving and taking power, mother to all that lived.

They knew of malevolent entities, enemies of the bright powers and some, very ancient, dwelling serpent-like in the land and waters, corrupting and consuming, hoarding and destroying with disease and cold and fire. They saw the struggles of the spirit world, mimicking the struggles of the earthly world, the numinal and phenomenal fully inter-connected, within each realm and between them, across the misty border of twilight-states. They saw the great cycles of space, time, sun, moon, birth, life, season, and death, endlessly whirling within the spindle of unguessable Fate and her pale handmaidens.

Among these men and women, our greatest grandmothers and grandfathers, as among all people in the ancient world, there arose a segment of spiritual workers who had the prerequisite strangeness about them, the cunning or bravery or unexplainable warping of mind, body, or soul which gave them access to the unseen. This special quality made them capable of channeling the mysteries of the unseen world, with all its living powers and bizarre, ancient entities, into the frame of reference of the common man or woman gathered around the night-time fires. They were practitioners of a series of related-though-broad spiritual esoteric sciences and practices, giving them the power to interact with unseen powers, speak to the dead, divine and prophesize, propitiate spirits, and move in spiritual journeys beyond the boundaries of the body, into the whiteness and darkness beyond sense and easy conception.

These men and women- the first sorcerers of these ancients- were parts of a cultural phenomenon captured distantly by the ancient word WEIK- “that which

regards sorcery and religious matters”. One etymological branch of that old word, WIK, pertains to the “sacred”, the “holy”, and the act of consecrating and even sacrificing. From WEIK, through its branch of WIH, we gain “guile” and “craftiness”- and seership, the person of the seer or prophet, and the sorcerer. We gain WEID, WID and WIT, “to see” and “to know”- two functions that are always connected in the ancient root-languages; from WEIK, finally, we gain WIKKE and WIKKERIE- and finally, down through the corridors of time’s mutations of language, we gain “Witch.”

WEIK might be called the “religion of the sorcerers”, but to those ancients, religion and sorcery were not yet evolved so far apart as to be seen as radically different or opposed to one another. Today, most see the two institutions of sorcery and religion as diametrically placed across a spectrum from one another; in reality, anciently, a more holistic view likely existed, displaying the mysteries of the holy and terrifying Unseen World as an integral part of what they experienced as “this world”- such that interaction with the unseen powers was as much an interaction with the deep places of the self as with the deep places of the world. Interacting with “them” was both religious and sorcerous- intended to bring about needful ends.

Most of us know where this true story of these ancient people goes: vast gulfs of time rise up and they break apart, migrate, wander, and enter into the group-story of other branches of the human family, always taking their related but mutating languages and sacred cultural root-concepts with them. They begin to take on different surface identities, drawn from changes in language that naturally occur when they integrate foreign languages they discovered, and they changed in response to the different lands they came to inhabit, coming to know new powers, civilizations, and mysteries. Their wise people laid down the seeds that would become what we call “myths” today; in some places, they lifted glittering cities to the sky and tamed the seas, empires rose and conquered and fell, and in others, they lived among forests and valleys in small groups and villages, maintaining a thriving and ancient tradition of storytelling and vibrant expressions of poetic art.

As time passed, “religion” and “sorcery” did drift apart into two separate-seeming phenomena; temples and state religions and priesthoods arose, and practitioners of the far-flung arts of WEIK dwindled into an indistinct group of practitioners of the spirit-art, in dozens of unique local forms, sometimes they were respected, in other places and times were seen with ambivalent eyes, and in others, with some fear or hostility. As ages passed, one thing remained the same: the Unseen World never lost its ability to confuse, frighten, or cause wonder. It was never explained away. It still has not been; and I contend that it never will be.

Ages changed and changed again, and a world like the one we know now began to take shape. The rather flimsy story of “history” became more and more codified as a tool of the powerful, and the spiritual destiny of all people in the west fell into the lap of the conquering monotheistic Catholic faith. With that institution arose a Europe which began to organize itself into the national groupings we know now; and in that recent chapter of civilization’s story, the stories of Gods, spirits, witches, and the world of the foretime have all become dim, shallow curiosities to most, and academic stock found on the dusty shelves of libraries and universities. Within those bits and pieces of the cultural past one may find just hints of the great world that once existed; one may also find keys to the doors that lead deep into the past, to the feet of the men and women who practiced WEIKERIE- the elder “craft” of the cunning and wise, those who see and know in ways that others cannot or will not.

Even in this world, this electron-haunted, mass-media linked world of consumers and bright lights, the strange powers that gathered behind the men and women of the WEIK still exist; as old as the desert sands or the steppe winds, as old as the lineage of oaks or ravens, the strangeness of the Unseen is still there.

In the Middle Ages, the potent echoes of Weikerie still glanced about the forests and village corners; to the laps of the healers, herbalists, hedge-sorcerers, craft-keepers and storytellers fell the ancient inheritance of the preternatural legacy of the foretime, though it was not (by this time) received in some directly “transmitted” form from other people; it came in a more profound way, as a part of the natural and innate metaphysic of the souls of people descended from the ancestors who knew WEIK, and from spirits. As the hateful “enlightenment” came, with its new sorcery of science and soul-choking materialistic empiricism, even those final bearers of the wisdom of the ancient world dwindled into caricatures encircled by mocking overtones of “superstition.”

Today, the notion of the religions and magical systems of the past as “absurd” and “superstitiously ignorant” still informs the minds of most so-called “educated” people- but the presence of WEIK is far from dead or stamped out. Like the Unseen World of which it is a part, it is forever dynamic and able to morph and transform and hide and appear, revealing itself even today in what times and places it will. The chief “place” it reveals itself, in forms sometimes ancient and sometimes unique to the modern day, is in the minds of men and women who bear the spiritual mark and developmental disposition required to make a fertile manifesting ground for it. Through those minds, minds that become bridges and gates, blade-edge bridges and doors of dream and nightmare, the oldest of stories is still playing out, still shaping the destinies of individuals and groups, and through them, the world, in subtle ways of connection.

WEIK, in its most ancient root-form, was certainly what we might describe as “necromantic”, “land-centered”, “mantic” in the sense of “divinatory”, and even “shamanic”, to coin an academic phrase appropriated from a people of distant Siberia. If we are to take the reports of sorcery throughout the ages as partial evidence for the shape of the distant “magical seeds”, we can say that WEIK dealt with the transformation of the mind and perceptions into shapes that could perceive the unseen; it dealt with the idea of journey through the skies and through night in a spirit-form or subtle body that could change its shape, and ride with spirits in the liberation of flight; it dealt with communication with the dead and the elfin spirits of the land, the “waihts” or “ansu” or the “people” under the hills- whether they be natural hills or burial mounds.

It dealt with propitiating nature-spirits that inhabited (and still inhabit) the natural world; it dealt with trance-delirium for the purpose of prophecy. It dealt with curses and cures for diseases; it dealt with deception of the senses and control of the faculties of others. It dealt with herb lore and wortcunning, the use of sacred intoxicants, and of mystical influence over the weather and beasts.

Within WEIK was certainly a notion of immortal spirit-bodies that survived the grave, and of transformations that could overcome the living and the dead in the post-mortem state, and how spirits could be bound, released, or accessed. Within it was a notion of rebirth for some, by mysterious means, and a notion of deadly, fatal consequence, binding all beings based on their deeds and Fate. There was a notion, as old as the Ancients themselves, of the birth and death and regeneration of the cosmos, which each individual life microcosmically demonstrated in its own birth, life, and death.

There was a notion of the transformative turning and binding that held all things together, and made all things- entities of any kind, no matter whether they appeared as human, plant, mineral, animal, or otherwise- actually and sympathetically connected and able to affect one another.

What is one to make of such things? What we must concern ourselves with most is the impact of WEIK’s undying legacy on the modern world which it exerts through each of us- we who have felt an attraction to the unknown and occult and the religious or spiritual experiences of the very old times. For some of us, that strange fascination will lead them to the altars of the Old Gods; for a small percentage, it will lead to the door of sorcery in the most authentic sense. The map of that journey leads through many houses and countries, and has many dead ends.

Some despair and never finish the journey. Others, however, find their way to the house of the Binding Weird-Lady and her pale women who weave the Fate of the world, and in the forested hollows of the Antler-crowned king. For some, it leads to the subversive, soul-shattering, soul-stealing and soul-reshaping initiations of the Master of Sorcery, who still leads covens here and there through the back roads of our towns and troubled woods. The dance of the “feery folk” is still going on, following the same ring that it followed when our ancestors first challenged the new world with their bravery and grasp for the extraordinary.

What these people find is more than just the timeless houses of ancient Gods or spirits. They find undimensioned reaches of the self “opened” and new capacities of thinking and experiencing unsealed, just as vibrant and alive as they were in ages past. The sorcerer of today and the sorcerer of ages ago both transcend “religion” and “magic” as a false division; they find the fullness of the human metaphysical potential, the true meaning of “spiritual ecology”, and they find the true poetry of life.

The path of Weikerie is not about rebirthing “old religions” into the modern day, though that may be an aspect of it; it would be more accurate to describe it as the ongoing relationship of timeless entities and powers with the modern day, through the minds and bodies of living people. Weikerie’s touch is melded seamlessly with the modern day, in surprising ways, but it is still different, ancient and new at once, and mystically potent.

The oldest powers- even those once worshiped as Gods- are still here, and by this distant age, their truest and oldest names have all but passed away into myth and forgetfulness; but their images still emerge from within the deepest places of the folk of WEIK; the spinning grand-crone, the blood-drinking woman of skulls, the phallic antlered man, the entity of light and raging force of insight, the spirit of the storm, the bodies of light in the ground, the fruitful and perilous earth-mother, the women in the wells and waters, the serpent-monsters and theriomorphs in the deep places, the hosts of the heavens and hells.

These images are not just phantasmagoria from a forgotten age; they are the avatars of real potencies that forever live in the out-weaving of the universal pattern. We, too, as human beings live in them and interact with them, forever. It matters not how much we have forgotten our place in things, and our place in the ancient tree of spectral inter-relation. The universe whirls on regardless, to our detriment if we remain forgetful. These images and forces live in us- all of us- at the deepest levels, and no matter of a few thousand years of following the creed of an alien religion and metaphysic can spare us the destiny-patterns set down by uncountable millennia of ancestral expression. When we rediscover the power of WEIK, we

rediscover who and what we really are- because this story I've been telling isn't fiction. It's reality; it was real; these grandmothers and grandfathers were real, and these beliefs were held by more of our ancestors than not.

We are those grandmothers and grandfathers, living now- spirit-bodies passed down through timeless spheres of experience, swam back to a human experience, all human bloodlines still bound by the patterns of ritual and culture and belief of the past, and shaped by true sorcerous workings of magnitudes that even myths today cannot adequately express. Their poetry was ours; their sorcery is ours, too. What sorcery channeled then is what it channels now- something trans-cultural and far beyond the human range of full comprehension; in real sorcery is a freedom from any limitation imposed by cultural boundary or twist of moral or politics. It is an encounter with the most authentic, timeless forces and powers, as they exist in the bodies and minds of men and women- and when taken far enough, sorcery is the final and ultimate transformation of a person's destiny.

SO WISE AND WINE

By Veronica Cummer

The Thorn tree has long been linked to both Witch and Faery, lending itself to practical as well as magickal usage. The Whitethorn and the Blackthorn are members of the *Rosaceae* family, which also includes the rose, and have been traditionally used in the creation of hedges throughout the English countryside. Hedges serve to mark out boundaries physically and symbolically. These boundaries are what Witches are meant to go beyond in order to seek the Old Powers and the Old Gods and commune with them, thus bringing back fertility, healing, and knowledge for the land and the community. Thus, it's no coincidence that Thorn trees are also tied to Faery and may be used as entrances to their realm and to many other realms besides.

The Whitethorn tree's other names include the Hawthorn, the Quick, the Haw, the Hagtree, Ladie's Meat, the Halves, and the May Flower or May Blossom because that's when its flowers tend to appear. In France it is called the *L'épine Noble* and, in Germany, the *Hagedorn*. *Hagedorn* means "hedge thorn" also showing its long association with the creation of hedges and boundaries, which also can be called *haws*. The Hawthorn has white blossoms that emerge around May and red berries called haws—though they also have more poetic names such as Pixie Pears and Cuckoo's Beads—that are especially good for heart conditions of all sorts.

Whitethorn or Hawthorn is believed to protect against negative magick and was said to attract not just the Fey, but spirits of all kinds. Traditionally, garlands for May Day would be made out of Hawthorn flowers and the lovely Queen of the May might wear a wreath out of the same blossoms, possibly because it was linked to brides in ancient times. People would go out "a maying" on May Day before the rise of the sun or right at dawn. May didn't just refer to the time of the year, but to the flowers of the Hawthorn which were blooming and so marked the beginning of the month of May and that summer has begun. The flowering branches of the Hawthorn was a particular favorite to be picked, along with Rowan, and it meant you wished someone good luck if you brought back some to give to them.

A single Whitethorn tree, especially one that is growing alone upon a hill, is a sure sign that a door to the realm of Faery lies nearby. To mess around with a Hawthorn tree was to risk the attentions of the Fey and if you dared to actually destroy a Hawthorn tree, you risked losing money, livelihood, even your children,

everything that you hold dear, to the ill luck that the Fey could dole out when angered. The Hawthorn is often found growing near old sacred wells, implying they are the same sort of tree you might expect to see when you attend the Witches' Sabbat—the world tree overlooking the well or spring and attended by the White Lady, the beautiful and terrible Queen of the Sabbat.

As the Hawthorn was a spirit tree, people would often leave offerings and prayers there, tying ribbons or strips of cloth onto its branches. This habit is described in *Historic Thorn Trees in the British Isles*, wherein the people would go to the sacred well and there dance around and around and tear pieces off of their clothing to be “hung upon the thorn.”¹ Quite probably, the idea of the wishing well is based upon these old wells, along with the thought of making an offering in exchange for the possibility of getting what you asked for. This went hand in hand with the habit of not changing your clothing until May Day, when you would finally put on fresh clothing, very much a symbolic gesture of rebirth and new life.

Hawthorn means “good hope” in the language of the flowers because it represents spring. In ancient Athens, young women would wear wreaths of Hawthorn flowers when they got married and the torch they carried was also made of Hawthorn wood. Whitethorn can also be used for protective magick and is sacred to many Goddesses, including Hekate, Flora, and Cardea, the Goddess of gateways. It's no real surprise then to know that Whitethorn is also tied to one of the two main transition points of the year, that of Walpurgisnacht, Beltane, or the Eve of May. This is one of the times when Faery traditionally rides out and all through the land, following the old roads, the lines of sacred and ancient energy.

Blackthorn is the reflection and match to the powers of the Whitethorn and stands opposite it on the wheel of change and the seasons. As the blooming of the Whitethorn was a sign that summer had arrived, so the ripening of the Blackthorn berries was a sign of the arrival of winter. This ripening was furthered by the first frost of the season, though it was also considered bad luck to pick the berries after All Hallows as then the fruit belonged to the Fey. These berries lend their name to the Blackthorn since it is also called the Sloe or Sloe Tree. The black fruit of the Sloe can be made into jam or wine and, more famously, the drink known as sloe gin.

Blackthorn wood is very hard and has of old been used to make fighting staffs or clubs. Its wood is also traditional for the creation of blasting rods or wands meant to cast curses or hexes. The thorn of the Sloe was used for pricking images or poppets in spells and so to cause pain, bad luck, or the spilling of blood. Basically, the Blackthorn provides a connection to the dark and chaotic powers available to the denizens of Faery and also to the power of the decay of time. Just like the

Whitethorn, the Blackthorn is linked to another main transition point of the year, that of Samhain, Sovane, or All Hallow's Eve.

Blackthorn is also called Straif, a name related to the word, *strife*. Its name is also related to *scathe*. Essentially, the Blackthorn or Sloe is a sort of wild plum tree, though its fruit tends to be rather bitter until after the frosts have come and sweetened it. The clan of the Fey sometimes said to have the strongest ties to the Blackthorn tree are called the *lunantishees* and they will take offense and punish anyone who takes a branch of the Blackthorn from Old Beltane (May 11th) to Old Halloween (November 11th).² But then to drink the wine of the Sloe is to drink of winter, of the bittersweet frost, of death. It's the berry of the dark Faery, of the rushing horde, and it rightfully belongs to them. Though, they will share with those who would dare the taste of what is yet to come.

Blackthorn belongs to Halloween, or to dead and sleeping time that continues from All Hallows until the light of the sun comes up over the horizon on the morning after Winter Solstice. Witches may "sleep" during this dead time between All Hallows and Yule, or at least give their personal power and vital spark over to the darkness, there to be renewed in the land of Faery. This fire is then returned to them when they face the sun on the morning after the longest night, greatly increased and purified and refreshed by its time with the Lord of the Land of Death and His kin. During the dead time between All Hallows and Midwinter any magicks that they have done must carry on with whatever energy they have already been given as the power of the witch is in the Otherworld with the Horned One.

Because the Whitethorn and Blackthorn trees are Faery trees, there are rules about when you can take things from them. In general, it's dangerous to disturb them and, even today, road plans may be changed in order to avoid cutting down a tree sacred to the Fair Folk. It's also considered bad luck to bring Hawthorn cuttings into the house or burn its wood indoors, though you may decorate the outside of your home with the branches, yourself, or a May Pole. They are very much similar trees, though one tends to be used for "white" magick and the other for "black." Each Thorn bears white blossoms—the Hawthorn blooming in the May and the Sloe in early spring, early enough to lend the term "blackthorn winter" to when it blossoms when the snow is still on the ground. The fruit of the Hawthorn is red, while the Sloe is black. Red and white and black are traditional Faery colors as much as Witch colors, along with the green of the wild wood.

But then the Blackthorn and the Whitethorn are the same tree in the eyes of Faery—they are both portals, save that one looks inward and one looks outward. The Whitethorn leads to a more active time of participation of the Fey in the world of men, while the Blackthorn takes them home again. One represents life, as in a

birth to this land, the land of the living, and one represents death or being “born” to the realm of Other, the land of Faery and the of the dead. The Whitethorn is tied to the White Goddess, the Queen of the May, the Lady of the Sabbat. The Blackthorn is linked to the Dark One, the Horned Lord, the Master of the Sabbat.

The Fey enter this land by the permission of the Goddess, there to more directly dwell for a time with their kin, the Witches. Which isn’t to say that they can’t interact with this world the rest of the time, but that this season is their time here as much as that of the Witch and when they take a more active role in this world and in the lives of their extended family. Witches, on the other hand, enter the land of Faery by the permission and hand of the God, there also to renew their immortal ties with the family.

Thorn hedges measure out these boundaries, that which separates the “living” from the “dead,” this world from the Otherworld. These boundaries are transversed by both Witch and Faery, they who are both part here and part there and so able to touch both places. Its just that the Witches are a shade more *here* and the Fey a shade more *there*. And where they meet is where the branches are woven together, where the roads cross, where the sky lies reflected in the deepest pools, and where the flames are kindled within the cave, within the barrow, within the still dark of the earth and of the heart. Thorn trees are both the veil and the gate, just as can be found within.

The Queen of the May is the White Lady, the Goddess of the Gate, the daughter of the Hawthorn. She is crowned with the flowers of Her lineage and She is the reflection in this world of the Queen of Faery, She who is seen as “white” because of how brightly She shines. When, in fact, this white shines so very brightly because it bears the dark within it, as the great darkness also keeps the light inside itself. The Dark Lord of the Blackthorn Gate is the wine, the thorn, the crooked rod and the crooked path. His power is opposite yet partaking of Hers as Her power is opposite and yet partaking of His. This is also an indication of the interwoven power of Witch and Faery magick.

The ways in which Whitethorn and Blackthorn are twined together reflects the nature of the way that this world and the land of the Fey, of the dead, are intimately connected. It reflects the inner nature of Witches and how they are best meant to know and to see and to touch and to walk in both worlds, and how they may aspire to many more. Even to the lands which lie beyond the boundaries of what is known and knowable, to the great abyss of infinite possibility of which even Faery is but a pale echo.

*Whitethorn, flowers bright
Twisted crowns the May Queen
Sacred glory set alight
Sacrifice to life a right.*

*Blackthorn, staff of might
Rise in death the secret right
Cursed twists to prick the sight
Within on Hallow's Even*

*Whitethorn, Blackthorn
Branches hung with spirits' sighs
Gates to equal realms
Look into each other's eyes.*

*Blackthorn, Whitethorn
Eternity to measure
Winter, summer, so entwined
In purpose and in pleasure.*

*White, Black, grows the Thorn
To twist and twine forever...*

*Whitethorn, Pale Lady knows
Mind you heed Her calling
Love will in promise kept
Set the blood to blooming.*

*Blackthorn, Dark Lord knows
Mind you heed His warning
Strike the sweetest sharpest blows
To keep the truth abiding.*

*Whitethorn, Blackthorn
At the season's turning
Pure beauty, quiet strength
Met in magick yearning.*

*Blackthorn, Whitethorn
Stem and blossom burning
Bound to dance the sword's edge down
To dance the round reborning.*

*White, Black, grows the thorn
To twist and twine forever...*

“Twisted Crowns” song lyrics by Veronica Cummer

(Endnotes)

¹ Vaughn Cornish, *Historic Thorn Trees of the British Isles*, quoted from *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves, International Authors NV, 1966, pg. 175.

² Ellen Everett Hopman, *A Druid’s Herbal of Sacred Tree Medicine*, Destiny Books, 2008, pg. 101.

WITCH BIBLES IN SERBIAN CRAFTING

By Radomir Ristic

In Serbian traditional witchcraft, coven structure doesn't exist. If we reject what we know from myths about witches, and only look at what we know from historical sources and field research, we will clearly see that all witches in the Balkans are solitary. They all are members of non-organized cults from specific regions of the country. Their methods of work are from shamanistic times and their basic beliefs are a mixture of old folk paganism and Bogumilian Gnosticism from the middle ages. It was during the middle ages that the type of Serbian Witchcraft that we know today was formed.

However, there are several types of ritual that witches from the same region perform together. Some of these rituals are public and the witches perform them along with other members of community, and there are others which are performed only in specific situations. During the rituals which are performed only in specific situation, members of community can be included as well but that is not essential.

On both of those occasions witches (male and female) form something like a coven which they call "The Court". So if only witches are members of the court, then they will choose who will be a leader of the ritual. If that person is a man then he will get title "Tsar". If the leader is a woman then she will get the title "Empress". Other men will be "Kings" and women will be "Queens".

If other members of community are included then the leader will be the "Tsar" or "Empress". Other witches will be "Kings" and "Queens". Male members (who are not witches) of community get the title "Court gentlemen" and women (who are not witches) "Court lady". Of course, there can be other titles for specific occasions like "Saber man", "Bag pipe man" or "Singer".

Let us give some examples. There was a public ritual in which witches would fall into a trance. The whole community was included in this event, but only witches used their ability to fall into trance. This event was performed annually in Duboka village. Witches participating in these rituals were called "Rusalje" which means "Falling Women". During the Christian holiday "Duhovi" (Spirits eng.) that overlaps with the village's holiday, the people gather in front of a deep cave at the source of the Dubocka river. Before gathering, communal rites dedicated to the

dead were performed, and they walked to the “wooden cross” (most often an oak) where food and drink were offered as a sacrifice. After gathering around the cave people would start to dance in “kolo” with the deafening music. That would last for some time until some dancers; women mostly, would start to faint, shiver, and fall down with a piercing shriek. This condition would represent entry into the trance state. On the ground, those persons were clenching, screaming, singing, or talking.

As they spoke, spirits of the dead entered them and communicated with them, or they were pulled out of their bodies by fairies, who took them away. They were brought back from trance in several ways. Sometimes they were sprinkled with chewed-up *Artemisia absinthium*, with garlic and vinegar, and sometimes they were sprinkled with the river water that was poured through a saber. There are many variations. While one person was in a trance, three girls in dress suits named “Queens” danced around them, along with three guys with sabers named “Kings” and a “Bagpiper”. This holy day was celebrated throughout the Balkan territory, but the ritual trance was preserved only in this area of eastern Serbia. Sometimes this whole ritual is called “The Queens”.¹

In other parts of Serbia there is a slightly different ritual with same name, “Queens”, which was also performed during the holy day called “Spirits”, Saint Nikolas or Saint George’s day. For this ritual people would chose one “Queen” two “Kings”, one “Court Lady” and four female “Singers”. Then they would dance a lunar dance to the left while singing, and they would visit all the houses in the village. Their intention was to bring fertility to people’s homes.²

A good example of the rituals which were performed only on specific occasions is a strange event that happened several times in history. The event occurred in Veliki Izvor village in 1908, and while the direct reason for it was a great drought, the local residents thought that the drought was caused by the Dragon that lived in their area. They thought their village was visited by the Dragon at night, because he had dates with some of the women, and because of its many flights the clouds could not gather over the village, and that is why there was no rainfall.

Because of this, some of the farmers suggested that “vrzino kolo” (a frenetic dance of witches and fairies) must be danced to drive away the Dragon- because for such

1 Kulisic, Petrovic, Pantelic, “Srpski mitoloski recnik” (Serbian mythological dictionary), Belgrade 1998, pp., 384-386.

2 Kulisic, Petrovic, Pantelic, “Srpski mitoloski recnik” (Serbian mythological dictionary), Belgrade 1998, pp., 255-256.

a powerful creature it is necessary to perform one of the most powerful rituals. So everyone agreed.

The ritual was performed late at the night between 21 and 22 July. Around fifty villagers gathered in the graveyard and lit a big fire. The leader of the process was elected; the so-called “Tsar” and he took off his clothes first, while other people followed him. Then they joined hands and began to dance around the fire. This frantic dance lasted as long as people were not totally exhausted, and some of them started to fall into a trance (this is our conclusion) because that is the essence of the “vrzino kolo”. While they were dancing, no one is allowed to talk and if someone wanted to say something, he would show this by miming or mumbling. When they determined that there had been enough dancing, people ran through the village banging on bells, dishes, etc. Once they had gone through the entire village, they started to chase the Dragon towards the graveyard, to the big fire. When they drove the imaginary Dragon into the fire, they joined their hands once more and started to dance around the fire again. This lasted until “Tsar” said it was enough.³

Although Svetislav Prvanovic, the person who recorded this event, did not mention if the man who was elected as “Tsar” was a witch, we know that he must have been. The reason is obvious. The people who would be elected to be “Tsar” or “Empress” were not only witches, but the best ones, the oldest or most powerful ones. All of them were keepers of traditions, rituals and knowledge, so the people chose them because only they knew which ritual was the best for that occasion, how they should perform it, and what should be done during the ritual etc.

From this and what we already know, we get a clear picture of what “The court” looks like and explain who plays which role. Of course, in most cases what “the witch’s court” look like depends on the reason it is being formed and the ritual which will be performed.

As we can see all witches in Serbia are solitary. If they are female they are “Queens” and if they are male they are “Kings”. It is only during group work that one witch could be elected as “Empress” or “Tsar”. This chosen witch must be best, most powerful one or the oldest one. There are no democratic elections and they do not direct the circle from ritual to ritual, so that any of participants could be “Empress” or “Tsar”. Their obligation is to choose a proper ritual for that specific occasion, to lead the whole ritual and give directions to other participants.

Other witches are “Queens” and “Kings”. Their obligation is to perform what ever the “Tsar” or “Empress” would tell them.

3 Svetislav Prvanovic, “Our ancient superstitions and customs”. Zajecar, 1961.

The ordinary people mainly will be “Court ladies and gentlemen”. Usually they don’t perform the ritual per se, but they can dance, sing or play on music instruments.

The “Saber Men” could be participants in a ritual, and they are usually guardians. If a witch is in trance, they stand over her and brandish a saber over her body so that some other entity could not take her body. Beside that they could perform a ritual return of the witch’s “soul” into their body in a safe way. On those occasions they pour water over the saber blade onto her face. Usually there is Artemisia, Garlic and vinegar in that water.

The “Bagpiper” is person whose obligation is playing music when the trance is included, in a ritual that can last for hours.

The “Singer” is usually a young girl or several of them. Their obligations are singing the ritual song.

As we can see there is no Magister or Mistress, and the basic structures of coven and “Court” is slightly different. So the question is where we can find the origin of the “Court” structure and the titles in it.

What we know for sure is that we shouldn’t look for the origin of that structure in folk paganism or shamanism, although some ethnologists claim that in most European countries spirits of nature had the title “Queens” and “Kings”. Witches use these titles because of this.

Our opinion is that we should look for the origin in the times when Serbian Traditional Witchcraft was formatted. As we know that time was the Middle Ages. In those times Serbia was part of the Byzantine Empire. This Empire had several kingdoms. So the ruler was the Tsar but every kingdom has his own King. All of these kings were under the authority of the Tsar. That is much like witch’s “Court” but this arrangement is just one part of the origin.

The Bogumils used a similar vocabulary for titles in their belief system and mythology. According to them, there is a Tsar in Heaven (God of the immaterial universe) and a Tsar on Earth (God of the material world and Underworld). In many myths, the Tsar on Earth was mentioned as a ruler of three kingdoms (Underworld, water and the earth itself). We know that mathematically he is a giver of hidden knowledge and magical power. His Lady consort is very similar to him.

So we can conclude that the witch who was elected to be “Tsar” or “Empress” was taking the role of God on Earth or his Lady. Other participants were taking the roles of his “Kings” and “Queens”. We assume that everybody who is under his

“command” become his “Kings” or “Queens”, because he or his consort are the forces which initiated these witches, gave them magical knowledge and the power to use that knowledge. Other participants get the names of their titles by what they do during rituals.

So “The Court” that witches form is actually the court of God on Earth. Titles in that court represent who is who in Tsar’s castle and castle it self represents material world per se.

Radomir Ristic’s book, ***Balkan Traditional Witchcraft***, is now available from Pendraig Publishing, Amazon, and all good bookstores.

THE ART OF INVISIBILITY

By Peter Paddon

So what's all this fuss about invisibility? In folklore, grimoires and the like, people seem to take an incredible amount of interest in this subject, and practically every old book on magic has a technique or two to share. But what do we mean when we talk about making ourselves invisible?

When it comes to movies or comic book heroes, invisibility frequently involves defying the laws of physics and ceasing to deflect photons. Whilst spectacular as a party trick, there are certain problems associated with this form of invisibility, as ably demonstrated in that masterpiece of literature, *The Invisible Man*, by H. G. Wells. In this fascinating story, the main character, Griffin, succeeds in making himself invisible, but finds that it is not all it is cracked up to be. First of all, he only made himself invisible, not his clothing, so it only really worked if he was naked. Then there was the whole gross-out factor of what happened when he ate, drank or smoked – the model of human anatomy I had as a child (the Visible Man, ironically) is the cleaned up version. Imagine trying to get a sandwich down yourself when you can see its entire passage... Lastly, but most importantly, it wasn't just other who could not see him, but he could not see himself either. This caused all kinds of self-inflicted injuries, plus the gradual descent into madness as he could not "close his eyes" and stop seeing the rest of the world in order to sleep.

So it is fair to say that for all the glamorous assumptions, true invisibility is quite impractical. Luckily for us, there is an alternative – glamour. In *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Douglas Adams explores the concept of invisibility, finally coming to the conclusion that rather than go to the trouble of making something truly invisible, it was far easier to paint it purple and erect a simple "someone-else's-problem" field around it. In effect, a glamour of invisibility doesn't stop others from seeing you, but rather makes them not want to see you.

Traditionally, invisibility comes with a selection of props. Folklore from around the world tells us of magical cloaks that, like the one worn by Harry Potter, make whatever is beneath the cloak unseen. Likewise there are many grimoires that use rings as the focus of the spell of invisibility, much like the One Ring in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

Scottish Witchcraft, and witches from elsewhere in the British Isles too, made use of a fern seed to become invisible. The lore was that the seed of the fern was itself invisible until the birthday of St John the Baptist, on which day the seed became

visible in order to fall to the ground and germinate. Modern spells can be found that still make use of this lore – although because the fern seed is so difficult to collect, it is replaced with a combination of a poppy seed – tiny, like the fern seed – and a dried fern leaf. Personally, I feel that if you're going to make use of a piece of Lore, do it properly!

Lastly, in the big Ceremonial Grimoires, such as the Key of Solomon, or the Abramelin system, you will find talismans, seals and sigils designed to conceal the person who makes and uses them.

But why all this fuss about becoming invisible? Apart from the dubious benefits of using it for larceny, espionage and other subterfuges, my personal belief is that developing the ability to make yourself invisible is a very useful skill. Not for the purpose of using the ability in some exercise in ambiguous ethics, but rather for the process of getting to the point where you can use it. Like so many things in the spiritual forum, the journey is more important than the destination. Because in order to place this sort of glamour upon a person or group of people, you must first develop the skills, discipline and focus to make it work, and these are skills that will benefit every aspect of your magical work. So just as magical lodges would test the magician's ability to evoke to physical appearance, the ability to make yourself or an object unseen demonstrates an advanced level of skill in a quite unambiguous way.

So, having found a valid reason for developing this ability, let's look in more detail at some of the ways it can be done, at least in theory. First of all, let's take a look at a spell that involves the fern seed – or at least a substitute for it.

This spell is basically a recipe for a powder that is strewn over the item to be concealed, though it can be burned as an incense, or carried about the witch's person, or made into an oil or salve to be applied to the body. At the dark of the moon, grind equal parts of dried fern leaf and poppy seed, and then add two parts slippery elm, one part myrrh, one part dried marjoram, and three parts of dillweed. Grind them all together, mixing well, and then add three drops of almondtincture or extract, wit henough spring water to make everything barely moist, and mix thoroughly.

Spread the mixture thinly in a ceramic bowl, and dry over a low heat until lightly browned. Scrape it back into the mortar and pestle, and grind again, this time using the chant:

Things seen, and things not seen
Let me walk here in between.

The powder should be kept in a glass container and used sparingly.

Another modern spell of invisibility involves closing your eyes and visualizing a sphere of white light around you. You then imagine that the light around you starts to blur, taking on the colors and shapes of the environment around you. You fade into the light, becoming part of it, until you completely disappear into it.

A more ancient way of achieving your goal can be found among the Enochian rites. This call is to be spoken aloud while all participants slowly spin widdershins, with their eyes wide open and arms outstretched. They visualize a sphere of dense black, smoky darkness surrounding them as they make the call:

URANUN CARIBE BAGLEN OL
GEMEGANZA DE-NOAN CHIIS GOSAA
ZAMICMAGE OLEOL AG-SAPAH ARPHE
ORESAS ETHAMZ TAA TABEGISORACH
ZODINU AR ZURAH PAREMU
ZODIMIBE PAPNORGE MANINUA
ZONAC DODSIH HOXMARCH TRIAN
AMONONS PARE DAS NIIS KURES

It translates to:

Visible only by will, I blind and make deaf all others who may see or hear me.
A darkness shall cover them like that at the bottom of the ocean,
and they shall leave immediately.
Forgetfulness will envelope their minds and anxiety grip their hearts
should they come to interrupt us in our work.

The participants then “see the darkness dissipate, as they fade into it, completing the process by laughing while spinning quickly deosil, and stopping suddenly.

Several martial arts teach that you can become invisible by learning to control your “chi”, by slowing or quietening it to the point where people do not notice you any more.

However, it is fairly obvious that all of these techniques do not include the key aspects that make them work – assuming that they do. So here’s a technique that I know will work if you take the time to master it, that I was taught many years ago back in England.

Start by sitting quietly, and find that still, calm center where past and presence

merge into an eternal now – basically your warded ritual space. Focus on it until you get that sense of the air being somehow thicker and still around you. Then visualize a mist coming out of your mouth with every outward breath, expanding to fill the space around you. Get a sense of it expanding around you in all directions for an infinite distance. Let the mist become the color of fine amethyst, a rich purple color. Once you have the color clear and strong, draw the purple mist around you like a shroud or cloak, as a barrier that obscures sight and sound. You may then move around and go about your business, maintaining the presence of the mist, and those you encounter will fail to see or hear you, as long as you keep the mist about you.

When you are ready, you may allow the mist to dissipate. And you will then be discernable by others. I think it goes without saying that this requires a lot of practice to get right, but it is effective if you train hard.

THE TRAVELLING MAN

By Robin Artisson

The land rises up, darkly wooded, and surrounds the house like a downy cloak, an obscuring field of green and brown which upsets the passage of time. Something of the old world is still living in the land under the house, and in the house. The little stream runs silently on, a boundary shades cannot cross.

The people who built this home in 1850 are still here. I have seen the photographs of the dining room, from many generations ago- the wreath of evergreen above the mantle, the dark-wood table and chairs, the tiny flames in the candelabra. Many nights bitter wind and snow beat against the house, but the family inside was warm and at peace together.

They are still at peace together; they see the underworld as their own house; they are not at all aware of what year I perceive it to be. In peace, they eat the food of the dead, while I eat my own bread and cooked meat in the same room they once dined in. This will continue for both of us- my family in the seen, and theirs in the unseen, until the light from the east comes and shows us both the truth.

I am a traveling man; I have seen the signs in the lodge, and the Horseman in the woods. We living men put too much stock in the vanity of perception: what number will I call the "year"? It has no number. Where shall I say I am? In the wooded valley? In the land of the living? All lands are really one land- what has changed in the dead is nothing but how they perceive. Maybe it is I who have changed, and they have it right. I ignore as much as they ignore, and I cannot say that I am so much happier in the comings and goings of my life than they. And yet, I contain a fire warming me that most of the dead dearly seek.

Who are we? Restless spirits that become fascinated with trees or snowy lanes? With houses and children? With mysteries or passion? I think that description is adequate in ways. What force drove us to our present passions and fixations? Whatever power did, I think that no force less than the original will serve to drive us onward to new destinies. In every jewel-like vision of the world, dark or light, full of snow or thirsty scrubland, crowned with houses and buildings or towering mountains, I feel that something has been embedded- a secret sketch of Fate- showing us all, whatever our situation, the secret pattern under destiny's plow.

There are things in the woods around the house- some look like people, some like

short, squat beasts that are part man and part animal, others that seem like drifting, living light. The ray of Weird reality seems to have broken into a million splintered projections when it passed through the prism of matter- and so we humans live in perpetual companionship with countless untold wonders and terrors of life.

Those refractions that fall within our “middle range” of being look like unto ourselves, and we join with them eagerly- but the bowers and distant places shelter a different order of being. We have always sensed them; we have named them, feared them, worshipped them, and finally disbelieved them- but they remain. They persist for the same reasons we persist. They have destinies like ours, though we may never understand.

The things in the forest have a Master; He rides along, between day and night, haunting mortal memory and imagination. There are books of folklore that speak of Him; books of faery-tales in which He appears in a dozen forms; there are books of magic that talk about Him, too- but more often than not, these three kinds of books are one and the same. Their themes are all of a Weird-power that summons Him.

It is not into some triangle marked on the ground, nor into thuribles of billowing incense that He appears; He appears in the inner recesses of the mind to those who are inspired by the secret key. The key is in the stories; the key is in the land; it is in the strange appearances and dances of the things out there, hiding behind the boughs and branches. It is the key that children are born with, and which graying adults laughingly tell them to discard. Life and death are discarded with it; Life and death are found when it is rediscovered.

Once he arrives, that old Horseman, he never disappears. He may leave, but He stays at the same time. He rides between “here” and “there”. So do we, if we are the true traveling men or women- if we can travel with the secret company that slips between raindrops and snowflakes like ghosts on the wind. The Horseman is embedded in the arcane map of the land above and below. He and all his kind- His courtiers, His servants, and His Lady. They are the people of the wind, of the invisible. They are the company of the storm.

Sometimes I’d stand outside at night, in windstorms. The trees would bend in the fierce gale, raining down invisible leaves and branches, and then, the gust would die out and it would be quiet suddenly. Just as quickly, another wind from the distance would roar up, like it was answering the call of the first, or perhaps chasing it across the dark landscape: two wind-spirits rushing past the sleeping houses and disturbed forests, heedless of anything else.

The old powers- older than mankind- were still living their ageless lives out, while we ignored them: Old Wind, Good Mother Green Gown, King Oak, Lady Birch, Cunning Master Raven, and all their kin: there they were, hidden in plain sight, in a patchwork of potent mythology that we just called “the woods” or “the country lane”.

I think witches must have been following those winds, flying along as they do, on their riding-poles, chased by familiars across the moonlit sky. These old hags, young women, and stranger men were still mindful of the power that was all around, and there, in the storm, they were waxing powerful in the deepest of lessons. Some of us lose heart. The world sleeps in forgetfulness. But some never forget.

Some lose the ability to see, but I can see. When I was given the mark of a traveling man, and I went to the forked road beyond the mountains east, I was given the golden drop of elixir that changed my eyes of water into eyes of fire. Now, I see what the water reflects, and within, what the luminous light of spirit radiates. There are eyes within eyes, and those inner eyes see the truth of things.

Finding a sorcerer was no easy thing. Finding a witch was seemingly impossible, in these days- thus, I was forced to seek the sorcerer in myself. That was not easy, either. When I did, I discovered that the road of the traveling man was no simple matter, full of hooks and crooks, turning forever into myself, and joining together places across space and time: places that look like high-gabled houses and steeped churches, as well as unseen castles of stone not piled by human hands.

In that ghostly weave-work there were tangles of sacred thorns and firs, rowans and oaks, and there were deep wells of water, ponds and gurgling streams. They all lined up, in their own ways; they pointed somewhere else. The peace of nature’s domain and the wildness of mystery were joined together in their arrangement. There was a sacred geometry here, not shaped by human hands, but dimensioned by human minds. The greater pattern contains us; we cannot write it nor mark it out.

The greatest majesty of Fate could be missed if you looked just to the left or right too much. If you saw with the eyes of luminosity, the world was nine times larger than it appeared, and nine times deeper, nine times more layered. Animals ceased to be what they appeared to be, and yet remained the same. Glorious beings of light and foul pits of darkness wandered the land, struggling in a beautiful fight that generated mortal life and the turning of seasons.

And between it all, hidden like a diamond in the bosom of ebon coal, was the Horseman, riding along, teaching His hidden ways. The witches and sorcerers I

couldn't find before appeared behind Him, and all over the hidden landscape- those cunning old fiends had learned to change their residence to a place that suited them better! They had found the key of life and death.

They changed their shape, their place, their minds, their form, their land. They did it with their words- creative words, creative in a way that only the tongues of Daimons should be able to manage. Their creativity was more than a warm place in the soul; it was a mind-shaking redefinition of all that man hoped or feared was real. It was rain falling, light pouring, deathless fire burning, and hypnotizing dances that couldn't make sense inside of three-dimensional space. It was the life of the universe, the heart-beat of the mighty Weird, the death of Gods and the birth of stars.

It all came together; it all came to cease, to rest, to hide in a single oak-leaf, drifting to the snowy ground outside the house. There was a light in the window. The night that had settled on the land was immense, filled only with the sound of wind and owls. Still, immense, and full of hidden glories.

I can read the secret in oak-leaves, or in any leaf. I am a traveling man; I wander a world larger than the map can reveal. I know the Horseman's word. I know the strange names by which fogs and mists are woven and unwoven. I have kissed the hands of the maids-in-waiting that surround the Lady. I know the names of the monstrous serpents that slithered across the virgin world, leaving mountains and valleys in the wake of their giant bodies. I know how to use the sorcery of words to change men's minds and shape their dreams.

WALKING WIDDERSHINS:

The Transgressive Element in Traditional Craft

By Jongiorgi Enos

For the sake of full disclosure, I should admit that I am an essayist, not a scholar; an armchair philosopher, not an academic. I may get the facts wrong, opinions expressed are my own, and my articles tend towards *starting* discussions rather than concluding controversies.

With those caveats in place: walk with me now westwards, in a widdershins way, down the sinister, crooked path, to survey the linguistic and cultural implications of the very words we use, and the practices we pursue, in witchcraft generally, and in Traditional Craft in particular.

Language often reveals lineage, a linear or lateral evolution of ideas floating in the menstrum of words. So it was with curiosity that I realized that the Tantra of the East, and the various witchcraft paths of the West, were both groups of practice known in their respective cultures as “*Left-Hand Paths*.”

It should be well known to students of esoteric traditions that the concept of ‘lefthandedness’—as a pejorative—has a broad history, appearing across nearly all languages and cultures throughout the world. There seems to be something inherent in the structure of our brains, and then reinforced over and over again in our word-forms, which is pre-disposed towards a prejudice of both the literal and the ideological *left*.

So ubiquitous is this pattern of left-hand prejudice, that neurologists latched on to this phenomenon as a topic of study from the early days of our knowledge about the physiology of brain hemispheres. It turns out that our wide-spread human distrust of the left-handed, may in fact be intuitive, part of our evolutionary survival mechanisms which make us suspicious of ‘the other.’ For left-handers certainly qualify as *others*—at least from the standpoint of being in the minority.

As Rita Carter points out in her (now somewhat dated) Mapping the Mind (University of California Press, 1998), more than 90% of the world is right-handed, a statistic which seems to have been consistent throughout human history (as extrapolated from the shape of Stone Age tools, the way cave pictures were drawn, and the way ancient game-animals’ bones were shattered by early human hunters). The irony here is that preference for using the right hand in skilled single-handed tasks, actually reveals the dominance of the left hemisphere of the brain.

For example, in Matthew's Biblical description of the final judgment of god (in chapter 25 of that Gospel, verses 33 to the end), the scribe includes a metaphor where god puts the sheep on the right side, the goats on the left side, then sends the sheep to eternal life and the goats to eternal hell-fire. Not only does this parable perfectly illustrate the religious contrast between so-called right- and left-hand paths, but when Trad Crafters in England voluntarily take the goat's head as a group symbol, and worship a god which conforms to the same Bible's descriptions of the Devil—they are doing so *knowingly*. There is a very specific and conscious level of rebellion against the prevailing norms of their time and geography, which gives birth to the calculated assemblage and manipulation of symbology chosen by the left-hand group. Even if this choice of personal imagery and practice is subconscious, it is in direct response to—and rebellion against—the prevailing norms of the time. This impulse by minority groups to rebel has always been present and it performs an important balancing function within human cultures as a whole—even if beneath the surface or hidden from view.

Andrew Chumbley called this impulse: “the intentional employment of a transgressive element.”² I love this phrase, and so have borrowed it for the subtitle of this article and one of its central ideas. This “transgressive element,” I believe, features in all so called left-hand movements. And it is in analyzing these transgressive elements that the study of such movements will bear the most interesting fruit.

A practitioner may ask themselves: “Does this practice work?” But a student of alternative religions must be cognoscente of the fact that almost *everything* works for somebody! A much more interesting question is *why* did a certain collection of practices or symbols develop in the way they did. Why does a set of imagery or mythic metaphors or symbols within a given practice resonate with that particular group in the way that it does? I suggest that such questions will often reveal a similar answer: because such chosen symbols, myths and metaphors directly rebel against the status quo familiar to the founders of said group. The rebellion or transgressive element sets up a tension in the practitioner, and that tension translates to energy, which can be used in the work.

Here's how I think it works. Imagery excites the human imagination, and therein lies its power. The more intensely a set of imagery excites the imagination, the more its potential effectiveness. For it is by altering the normative state of human consciousness—what I call ‘exciting the imagination’—that we open ourselves to the forces which conduct this work or activate the centers within us that conduct this work (depending on your preferred model or how you theorize the method of action of such forces—be it gods, ancestors, spirits, the power of human

2 See Chumbley's “The Leaper Between” essay, originally in *The Cauldron*.

intention, quantum physics, or what have you). Whatever your model, witches have long used a variety of tools to achieve states from which effective workings can transpire. All these tools somehow excite the imagination, activate the brain, alter the consciousness, or otherwise energize or entice the forces or fates of the universe or the land, sufficient to effectuate change, either within the individual or on the material plane.

Certain things tend to fire the human imagination particularly well, such as aspects of danger and fear. Our bodies are tightly calibrated alarm bells with sophisticated systems of chemical and electrical changes which respond to emotional alarms. Setting up a state of emotional tension is one such mechanism to activate the body's systems which facilitate even subtly altered states of mind and perception. Magicians and mystics have a long history of learning how to tap into the body's natural faculties to increase the efficacy of workings—be they magical or mystical. I propose that the transgressive elements in certain left-hand spiritual constructs are just one of those many tools available to heighten the effectiveness and experience of the seeker following such a path.

In some cases, then, it is an image-set's *transgressive-ness*, not in the image or action itself, or its pre-Biblical antiquity, or any other factor, which gives the imagery of such traditions a sufficiently effective tension. And it is the extent of that tension which directly translates into a practitioner being able to use it with great power and effect in their work. Granted, any image must have power to excite the practitioner's imagination in order to be effective, but when that inherent ability is also coupled with the excitement of a *transgressive* element—how much more potent the image can be.

This theory may be rejected out of hand by some who read this. Some may say it is too intellectual, or rejects specific spiritual legitimacy or diminishes any literal or inherent quality of a given system. I do in fact tend to reject anything which sets itself up to be the 'one and only way' and therefore tend to view with skepticism too much emphasis on any form of 'scriptural literalness'—be that scripture a grimoire, a bible or a myth. Human history, and the history of religion, is simply too filled with evidence that there are many paths to the same source. But I am a spiritual being, and have experienced great power in spiritual workings from a number of quite different traditions, and collected a plethora of testimonials from an even greater number of traditions. The only thing which connects all of these experiences is the human brain—the fact that people did these things and experienced these things. So any theory of spirituality, magic or mysticism must, in my opinion, come back to that brain. If the key is in our brains, and if all of the disparate spiritual, mystical and magical methods over time have involved making alterations to the perceptions and experiences of those brains (which they

have—and some of those experiences can now be duplicated in a laboratory), then I must hold to this theory for now, though it may change as more evidence pours in. I search for clues through the study and experience of various systems.

If my theory is right, there are certain ways in which it might be tested. For example, I believe there will always be a constantly evolving left-hand tradition of some kind or other, which will continually find and integrate aspects of practice and imagery which are directly transgressive towards the established norms of the day, in order to tap into the latent power of the tensional dynamic between the safe and the dangerous in the human imagination. If this is correct, then as those norms change, so must the rebellious elements in these various paths also change—albeit slowly and over time.

I also suspect that the weaker the status quo (against which such traditions set up their rebellious energy) gets, the less important the more specifically transgressive symbologies will become for those left-handed groups. The rebellious symbolic structure will lose its edge or ability to excite. To use just one example, if Christianity, and the Biblical imagery attached to it, happen to fade significantly at some point (as many suspect is happening), then certain imagery and iconography utilized to great effect by certain Traditional Witchcraft groups might fade or become de-emphasized. If the Christian Devil ever becomes significantly less dangerous in the collective social imagination, will the devil-like god of some of the witches have to be modified to sustain his evocative power? I don't know, but I find the question itself evocative, for I can feel within myself the power of the tension inherent in rectifying an image of the devil-like god in contrast to the Christian distortion of the same—precisely *because* they are at odds. It is their contrast, their dramatic comparison, the battle within the imagination, that *by itself* energizes this thought-form with such potency. Will such imagery, iconography or symbology continue to exist if the rebellious, contrary mirror cracks in its reflective impact?

I do not say that such imagery is without inherent power or merit. Peter Paddon argued in an article in Issue 3 (Fall 2008), that much Biblical imagery used in some Trad Craft traditions can be shown to pre-date Biblical sources. And much of it is evocative even without comparing and contrasting with more normative imagery. But I would argue that such imagery only became valued as highly as it has become, in significant part, because of its power to shock; because of the pattern of tension it introduces into the mind of the contemporary practitioner, whose socialized brain *cannot escape* comparing it with the normative context, which he or she knows well. The subliminal tension, then, between the Chumbly-identified “transgressive element,” and the broader and well-known normative context, creates the *reactive context*, a state of inner tension out of which powerful magical working can transpire. This reactive context only exists while the working imagery

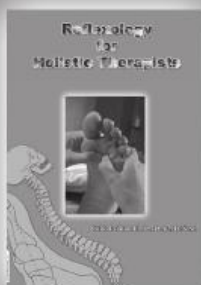
is in direct contrast to the prevailing norms of the time. If the norms change, the imagery must change. Referencing pre-Christian sources is a convenient way of claiming an ancient legitimacy, but I propose that the real power of such imagery in the present, happens within the mind of the current practitioner. Throughout history, practitioners have found that they got an extra boost when the workings they explored were in contrast with the normative structures all around them in whatever their day and age. This is the very definition of the left-hand path or widdershins walk.

We live in a rapidly accelerating time in history. I believe that the rapid development of alternative religions which we are now witnessing is in part a direct response to the huge fluctuations in influence now happening to the major religions. The social forces at play are linked. But regardless of how large and popular any alternative religion may become (Christianity and Islam used to be petty upstarts), there will always be some fraction of the community which will choose to rebel, and create religious structures in direct contrast with whatever norm prevails during their time. As a thought experiment, imagine a possible (but unlikely) future. In 100 years, say, if Wicca boasts a billion practitioners and Christianity has sunk to only a few million scattered about, it is likely that Traditional Crafters would still be a rebellious holdout, with very non-Wiccan forms of practice. But I suspect, in such a world, the god of the rebels would look much more like an anti-Wiccan Goddess & God, than an anti-Christian devil-of-sorts. Or, to invent another example, if in 100 years, sexuality is completely open and accepted and widely practiced in a completely guilt-free way, it is not likely that sex-magic or tantric sex explorations would be much of a factor in left-hand paths—such practices would be mainstream. If there were such an open, indulgent norm, it is almost certain that the left-hand paths of such a day would be vastly more ascetic in their practices. And so the pendulum will perpetually swing.

I could be off-base on all of this, but it is worth exploring this hypothesis: that it is the dramatic tension inherent in the non-normative practices of so-called left-hand paths which has always been an important factor in their effectiveness and their appeal to at least a small fraction of the population. The employment of specifically *transgressive* elements in these paths has been intentional, because it is effective. It is effective, because of how our brains work. There will always be a certain minority segment of the population whose brains are different than the rest of us because nature allows such anomalies. It allows such anomalies because of the unexpected feats of invention and creativity that occasionally come from them.

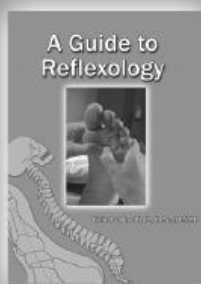
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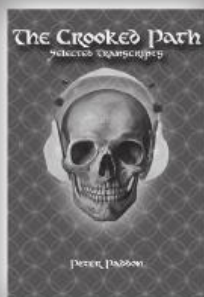
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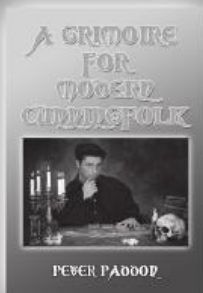
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